

Our Loyalties and Antipathies

By BRUCE CURRY, PH. D.

Professor, Union Theological Seminary

(This paper was presented at the Paterson, N. J., Seminar of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, sponsored by the National Conference of Jews and Christians, 289 Fourth Ave., New York City.)

OUR problem as cultural groups—religious, racial, and national—is to eradicate antipathies while holding to what is of value in our group loyalties. All too often we have been taught that loyalty to our own group necessarily involves antipathy for the groups that differ from our own. So deeply is this impressed upon us that there is little chance for healing antipathies unless we can bring ourselves and others to accept a new set of principles for the governing of intergroup relations. I venture to suggest four such principles, not yet accepted or even grasped by the majority of people. This is to admit that they are debatable. But if true, their general acceptance may prove revolutionary in improving the relationships between religious and racial groups.

1. The first principle might be stated thus: *Variety, not uniformity, of cultures is enriching and hence to be desired.* The world has labored mistakenly on just the opposite theory. Yet it can be proved from history that uniformity carries in itself the seeds of dry rot. To the extent that any nation or religion has succeeded in imposing itself universally, it has begun to dig its own grave. The most worthy and splendid cul-

tures have developed under the stimulus of contact with others unlike itself. This can be shown in the life of Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism. This very variety forces each group back upon what is essential in its system, causes creative growth, and prevents preoccupation with non-essentials. Racially and nationally this principle has always been recognized. No one wishes to see all men of one race, or believes the world could be combined into one nation. The principle has not been conceded as applying to religions. Is this not the next step? Its acceptance would not prevent a large degree of sharing among religious groups of those values developed within the peculiar culture of each group.

2. The second principle follows: *Loyalty to one's own group does not necessarily involve antipathy toward other groups.* We have too long been taught that it does; that group loyalty is built up by animosity toward and conflict with opposing groups. But antipathy comes only when our first principle is ignored and each religious group feels that it must impose its culture on the entire world, leading to cut-throat competition. This policy is sure to bring a natural resentment on the part of those whose own culture is invaded and disparaged in the process. Religious groups must come to learn what national and racial groups are just beginning to comprehend, that there is a live and let live policy whereby groups can cooperate to the best interests of all, minimizing competition and allaying the consequent antipathies.

3. As a third principle I offer this: *Mutual respect between groups must be based on understanding, not on ignorance.* There is a superficial respect possible on the basis of ignorance. This is easily shattered upon first acquaintance. We must get past that first stage of shock and on into real understanding if the more genuine respect is to be achieved. Too often we have gone

on the facile assumption that if persons of differing cultures could just be brought together a deeper understanding and mutual respect would be the immediate result. Not necessarily. Experience shows that first contacts usually reveal more fundamental differences than had been suspected, making respect, for the time being, even more difficult. If people have the patience to move through this disconcerting interval until they can really put themselves in the other person's place, they may come to a mutual respect much deeper and truer than the genial but spurious respect which existed at the beginning.

4. The fourth principle calling for recognition today is this: *Group loyalty is validated only by a stronger loyalty to something greater than the group itself.* Group culture and group-developed values lose their meaning except as they contribute to the individual's higher loyalties. When one's religious, racial, or national loyalty causes him to forget or deny his loyalty to something higher, he becomes untrue not only to the greater ideal but also, whether he knows it or not, to the smaller group. Just as a nation is crippled by its one hundred per cent patriots, so a religious group is stultified by its narrow loyalties. The smaller loyalty must ever be sacrificed to the higher, not merely in the interests of the higher, but even for the integrity of the lesser group itself. This paradox has escaped the notice of many. It is, in essence, the principle of losing life in order to find it.

What are these higher loyalties which give meaning to our lesser loyalties, and whose recognition would minimize the present antipathies between religious and racial groups? We suggest four of them.

1. Loyalty to the American ideal of freedom—religious, political, and economic freedom. It is obvious how far we are from the full achieve-

ment of this ideal. It has been smothered because we cared more about smaller group loyalties.

2. Loyalty to the world-neighborhood ideal, which calls for the transcending of barriers. It is now realized that there is no life for our modern world unless the barricading process is checked and reversed. Some of these barriers are artificial, have outlived their day and must be abolished. Some of them are natural barriers, having a genuine value if not raised too high; these must be lowered sufficiently to permit friendly intercourse. But we shall not be able to work at this greater base if we cannot learn to begin at home by transcending the more immediate barriers of class, religion, and race.

3. Loyalty to the human ideal of respect for personality, subordinating all else to the meeting of urgent human need. When we unite in loyalty to such a great cause we shall find lesser loyalties put in their proper place. There will be little or no room left for antipathies.

4. Loyalty to the highest spiritual ideal, loyalty to God, if you please. When we realize that the common foe of all religion is the materialism, secularism, and atheism so wide-spread in our modern world; when we commit ourselves wholeheartedly to the ideal of a spiritual universe, a friendly universe governed by the great God who is Father of all, then shall we demand that all religious groups make this loyalty paramount, dropping the narrower antipathies in one common effort on behalf of spiritual oneness.

Theoretically, we are all devoted to these higher loyalties. No one would rise to debate the priority of their claim upon our allegiance. The question is whether we care enough about them in very truth to demand that our religious and racial groups shall so lessen their claims upon us as to leave us free to dedicate ourselves to the achievement of these higher ideals in cooperation with all men, regardless of nation, race, or religion.